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NUTRITION

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Helping People To Help Themselves

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Extension Aide Program

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CURRENT SERIAL RECORDS

The expanded food and nutrition education program of the Cooperative Extension Service has now been underway for about one year. Its purpose is to reach the poor of our nation and help them to improve their levels of living. Extension "program aides" are making contacts with low-income families, providing facts about food and nutrition, demonstrating better ways of feeding the family, making referrals to other agencies, and in general helping people to help themselves. In the months since the inception of the program, the Cooperative Extension Service has learned a good deal about the use and values of nonprofessional workers in this area. In this issue of NPN, we will briefly summarize the food and nutrition program including how both professionals and nonprofessionals evaluate it.

Aides are working in every State and in D.C., Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The funds for the program were allotted to States based on the Office of Economic Opportunity formula for poverty in the United States, which includes income and size of family.

Sites for the program were selected by the State Extension Services which included both rural and urban areas. However, the program is not in every community.

The greatest number of aides are located in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, California, and New York since these States have the largest number of low-income families.

Recent figures show that there are nearly 1,000 counties and cities with more than 7,000 aides trained and supervised by county home economists who, in turn, are trained by the State staff. It is estimated that the program is now reaching over 350,000 families.

Youth phase

A new phase is being added to the program. Seven and a half million dollars will be used to hire professionals to train volunteer leaders to work in cities with youth from low-income families.

This will fill a much needed gap in the program because young people do not readily improve their diets simply because a good assortment of food is made available to them at home. These young people must be taught not only to accept a good assortment of food, but to recognize one so that they can make good selections when eating away from home. This teaching will be particularly helpful to the many young people who are responsible for the family's meals.

We are indebted to Dr. Evelyn B. Spindler, Nutrition Specialist, Federal Extension Service, for providing a wealth of information and generous consultant help in the development of this article.

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AIDE PROGRAM

Extent of program

In November 1968, Orville Freeman, then Secretary of Agriculture, allotted 10 million dollars of Special Funds to the Cooperative Extension Service for hiring and training aides to help improve the levels of living of low-income families. This was enough money to pay for the training and salaries of about 5,000 aides (two-thirds full-time and one-third part-time) through June 30, 1969. Funds were appropriated to annualize this program for 1970 and for limited expansion.

RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, AND SUPERVISION OF AIDES

The use of nonprofessional aides in community programs is not new. The Federal Extension Service and the Alabama Extension Service experimented with the idea for five years (Alabama Pilot Project). The purpose of that study was to (1) develop and test methods of reaching and teaching young homemakers, (2) develop, test, and evaluate educational literature designed especially for this group in the fields of family financial management, nutrition, housing, and child development, and (3) test the feasibility of using part-time subprofessionals, working under the direct supervision of a professional home economist in an educational program for young homemakers.

Selection of aides

From experience in past community programs, the following have been established as desirable qualities for an aide:

- Empathy and compassion for low-income families.
- Keen perception and appreciation of various values and standards of our society.
- Ability to work with people (perhaps as a volunteer in church and other community activities).
- Maturity and flexibility, receptiveness to new ideas, and willingness to accept supervision from professional staff.
- Energy, enthusiasm, and willingness to work, even when results are minute and delayed.
- Acceptable standards in homemaking skills.
- Enough educational background to understand and follow training policies necessary for conducting an educational program on this level.

Programs now underway vary widely in where they look for individuals displaying these qualities. Some leaders find the indigenous aide to be the best choice. They feel that she is best able to bridge the gap between the professional worker and the disadvantaged family because she (1) knows the family's language, (2) understands its problems, and (3) can get into homes of the disadvantaged more easily than the professional worker.

Other leaders find that some of their most successful aides come from the better educated middle class group. The mature rather than the young person often is most helpful to families. All of which leads us to believe that success of the aide depends largely on her individual qualities.

Training of program aides

It is expected that programs will vary, but to assure standards of accuracy of information and sound educational

approaches, all aides must have some basic training especially designed for them (about 3 weeks) and then continuing inservice training by qualified home economists and nutritionists. They must also have close supervision by a competent professional to help them cope with unanticipated problems.

In order to help State and county Extension workers with the training and supervision of program aides, the Federal Extension Service, with assistance from State specialists, the Food and Nutrition Service, and the Agricultural Research Service, prepared a series of training guides and materials at three levels.

1. Guides to be used by the professional home economist responsible for teaching and supervising aides.
2. Guides for the program aide to use in working with the families.
3. Leaflets for the disadvantaged homemaker.

Working with low-income families.—Aides receive preliminary instruction on how to work with disadvantaged families before subject matter areas are introduced. They learn some of the characteristics of this group which in turn suggest methods of reaching and teaching them.

Early in the training period, aides visit homes and begin to see some of the problems on which the homemaker desperately needs help.

Food and nutrition training.—Food is almost always a problem; thus, it is a good place to start the aide in her work with families. The food and nutrition lessons for program aides are in line with the basic concepts of nutrition developed by the Interagency Committee on Nutrition Education. The subject matter includes:

1. *Food selection* based on the four food groups included in "Food for Fitness—a Daily Food Guide," USDA Leaflet 424.
2. *Food needs* of family members expressed in servings of the variety of foods from the above groups.
3. *Food buying* with better use of the food dollar.
4. *Food storage* to conserve quality and nutrients.
5. *Food preparation* to conserve nutrients and satisfy tastes of family members.
6. *Best use of facilities* that are available.
7. *Sanitation* to keep food safe to eat.

During the 3-week induction program, the aides are given a basic background of 15 lessons in food and nutrition. Additional inservice lessons are generally offered weekly in informal classes, small enough to let everyone participate. During the rest of the week, the aide visits homes and tries to carry out the suggestions she has received.

At each session the aides and the trainer agent discuss the experiences of the previous week in addition to the

lesson on food and nutrition. This provides an opportunity for the aide to share her experiences—including successes, failures, and persistent problems—with the teacher and the other aides. She often learns how to turn a failure into a success and how to attack a particularly difficult problem.

From these discussions the professional gets clues as to the direction her teaching needs to take and about points that should be clarified or emphasized. It is a mutual learning situation.

Supervision

Careful supervision of program aides is essential, particularly at the beginning. It must be remembered that the aides are learning. They may feel a little insecure and, undoubtedly, will encounter problems for which they are not prepared.

Supervision, like training, varies from State to State. For the most part, however, supervisors keep in close touch with the aides. They visit with the aide occasionally, are available for consultant help at all times, and work with aides individually and in groups during the inservice training sessions.

EVALUATION

Everyone, from the administrator to the newest program aide, wants to know how the program is doing. The expanded food and nutrition education program of the Cooperative Extension Service had evaluation built into it from its inception. The Economic Research Service of USDA was asked to conduct a quantitative evaluation. Specialists from the Agricultural Research Service and the Federal Extension Service assisted, particularly in the development of tools of evaluation. In addition, the Extension Service used its usual procedures (the keeping of logs by the aides), and a special contract was negotiated with an outside group, Data-graphics, to examine training at all levels in seven areas during the first 5 months of the program.

Quantitative evaluation

As each family enters the program, a profile of the family is gathered. This provides a description of the family—its economic resources, cultural background, and the like. The aggregate of these profiles gives information on such things as how many and what types of families were reached and how many aides and professionals were used to teach them.

Also as a part of this quantitative evaluation is a 24-hour recall of food eaten by the homemaker. This information is obtained by the aide early in the program and at 6-month intervals thereafter. The aide records the foods eaten, but

not the amounts. This information gives direction to the home economist in planning her work with the aides to show them where emphasis needs to be placed. The first recall also provides a benchmark for evaluating how much information the homemaker has gained as a result of the aide's visits.

Logs of aides

Each program aide keeps a log in which she describes her work with families. From these descriptions, home economists can learn about changes in attitudes and in practices of the homemakers. They can also get some indication of whether the homemaking behavior of the homemaker is keeping pace with the information she acquires as a result of participation in the program.

Evaluation of the program by the aides

Aides in many areas were asked what they thought of the program. Almost invariably they said it had improved the levels of living for their own families. (Home economists also reported improvements in the aides.) Their reports also indicated pride in their new knowledge and skills. For the most part, aides felt greatly rewarded at the progress, however small, of the families they served. When asked about areas in which they felt they needed more help, many of the aides suggested more training in (1) understanding and working with people and (2) food and nutrition information.

COOPERATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

In some counties, the program aides appear to be liaison persons with many other community agencies such as health and welfare agencies. They not only make referrals to the appropriate agency but may accompany the homemaker on her first visit.

As in other phases of the program, this cooperation varies from State to State.

IN CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that using nonprofessionals in an educational program has certain dangers. They do not have an extensive enough background in subject matter to make sound interpretations and apply them to the complex problems that cannot be anticipated and must be met. Also, nonprofessionals often do not recognize these problems as ones that should be referred to the nutrition specialist.

The Extension Service appreciates this enthusiastic help, but it feels responsible as a representative of a land-grant college and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to keep teaching accurate. Thus, the best possible preservice and inservice training and supervision must be maintained.

Nutritionists and workers in allied professions can help by evaluating the program by the good it achieves for its clientele and by helping community groups to understand it—its potential and its limitations. Also, they can help, on request, by contributing to the preservice or inservice training of the aides

MATERIALS

Listing of these materials is for the information of readers and does not necessarily mean recommendation. Materials or information may be obtained from the addresses given.

Food and nutrition

Vegetables in Family Meals—A Guide for Consumers. Home and Garden Bulletin 105, U.S. Department of Agriculture. For sale by Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402. Price 15 cents.

Cereals and Pasta in Family Meals—A Guide for Consumers. Home and Garden Bulletin 150. U.S. Department of Agriculture. For sale by Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402. Price 20 cents.

Apples in Appealing Ways. Home and Garden Bulletin 161. U.S. Department of Agriculture. For sale by Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402. Price 15 cents.

Pork in Family Meals—A Guide for Consumers. Home and Garden Bulletin 160. U.S. Department of Agriculture. For sale by Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402. Price 20 cents.

How to Buy Meat For Your Freezer. Home and Garden Bulletin 166. U.S. Department of Agriculture, C&MS. For sale by Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Price 20 cents.

Money-Saving Main Dishes. Home and Garden Bulletin 43. U.S. Department of Agriculture. For sale by Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402. Price 30 cents.

How to Buy Poultry. Home and Garden Bulletin 157. U.S. Department of Agriculture, C&MS. For sale by

Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402. Price 5 cents.

Freezing Combination Main Dishes. Home and Garden Bulletin 40. U.S. Department of Agriculture. For sale by Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402. Price 10 cents.

Home Canning of Meat and Poultry. Home and Garden Bulletin 106. U.S. Department of Agriculture. For sale by Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402. Price 15 cents.

Keeping Food Safe to Eat—A Guide for Homemakers. Home and Garden Bulletin 162. U.S. Department of Agriculture. For sale by Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402. Price 10 cents.

Baking for People with Food Allergies. Home and Garden Bulletin 147. U.S. Department of Agriculture. For sale by Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402. Price 10 cents.

Food consumption

Nutritional Review, reprinted from "National Food Situation" November 1969 and "A Table of Food Consumption Per Capita for 1947-49, 1957-59, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968 and 1969." 8 pages, CFE (Adm.), 299-4, January 1970. USDA. Available from Consumer and Food Economics Research Division, Agricultural Research Service, USDA, Hyattsville, Maryland 20782. Single copies free.

TOWARD THE NEW

A Report on Better Foods and Nutrition From Agricultural Research

This report features interviews with nutritionists and other experts of Agricultural Research Service who are carrying on research to determine nutritional needs, to find out the nutritive value of foods, and to produce better foods to fill human needs. "Toward the New" is especially timely following the President's White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health. It will soon be available from Office of Information, USDA.